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# British trade unions and the academics: The case of Unionlearn

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## Abstract

Unionlearn and union learning representatives were developed by the British TUC to match workers with education and training opportunities, strengthen the economy, foster market inclusion and facilitate social mobility. Their contribution to union revitalisation was emphasised. This article questions whether, with unions confronting global crisis, this is a necessary initiative. It stemmed from TUC failure to achieve policy goals, institutional needs, consequent acceptance of a lesser role, and the availability of state finance. Claims it provides influence over state policy and contributes to revitalisation remain inadequately evidenced. Union resurgence is not immanent. The way forward is through adversarial grassroots organising and socialist education, not through retooling capital, improving members' marketability and partnership with a hostile state.

## Keywords

Unions, training, organising, revitalisation, academics

## Introduction

The TUC strategy to revitalise British trade unionism has not worked: instead, in today's global crisis, the decline in union membership has resumed. Unions have lost 480,000 members since 2008; and around 75 per cent of the labour force, 85 per cent in private industry, remains unorganised. Only a third of workers are covered by collective bargaining, which in the public sector, has contracted by 10 per cent since 2000. There are currently

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102,000 shop stewards, compared with 330,000 in 1985 (Brown et al., 2008: 78-81). The TUC campaign against austerity has achieved limited success.<sup>1</sup>

The twin-track approach, integrating partnership – offering collaboration from weak unions to unenthusiastic employers – with adversarial organising, foundered, as the left had predicted, on their ‘fundamental incompatibility’ (Hyman, 2001: 111). Acknowledging the intractable environment and accepting that there are no easy solutions, radicals have urged a rejection of partnership and the concentration instead of energies and resources on grassroots organising (for a recent summary see Badigannavar and Kelly, 2011). The TUC has persisted in prosecuting partnership. It has pursued collaboration with capital and the state over ‘union learning’ as part of its partnership strategy. Where unions are recognised, union learning representatives (ULRs), who possess no negotiating rights, advise employers and employees on vocational training and wider learning opportunities. Initiated under New Labour as a contribution to vocational training policy, this project continued under the 2010 government, despite the unions’ campaign against Coalition policies. Under a pact renewed in 2011, the Coalition pays £21.5 million annually into the TUC-administered Union Learning Fund (ULF) for delivery of its training policy. The TUC’s Unionlearn recently employed 171 staff, and outcomes include training ULRs, and study for NVQ, IT and ESOL diplomas, and degrees.

The retiring TUC general secretary, Brendan Barber, pronounced this initiative ‘the single most important development in trade unionism in a generation’ (Barber, 2007). In this narrative, union learning adds value to capital, improves British capitalism’s prospects in global competition, and provides union members with marketable skills and individual mobility. It is depicted as the latest episode in a seamless history of trade union educational endeavour. It brings unions influence over state policy, diminishes social inequality, and contributes significantly to organising and union revitalisation. Help with learning prompts workers to join, remain in or become active in unions (TUC, 2006a: 7). The project has been validated by industrial relations academics, many of whom have worked with the TUC and affirmed its success (see, for example, Rainbird and Stuart, 2011).

Much of this may appear contentious to readers of a journal of Marxist critique. Socialist scholars and union militants will question whether in conditions of economic crisis and shrinking union resources, delivering services with which a hostile state may fine-tune capital is the way forward. Diverse analysis (Lloyd and Payne 2007; Lawson and Lanning 2012) has challenged the state policies the TUC espouses. Inequality did not diminish under New Labour, and indeed, is increasing (Dorling 2011). Based on individual mobility, union learning has little in common with union-sponsored education for class emancipation of the past, reformist or Marxist (McIlroy 1996). It is about strengthening capitalism, not working-class consciousness and power. It reflects Raymond Williams’s image of the educational ladder, ‘the perfect symbol of the bourgeois idea of society ... you go up the ladder alone ... many working class leaders have been dazzled by this alternative to solidarity’ (1958: 317-18).

These points merit further exploration, but our purpose here is more restricted. We focus on claims that this project represents success for TUC policy, reflects and engenders influence over the state, and contributes significantly to organising and revitalisation. We demonstrate that measured against democratic goals, achievement is

unsatisfactory. Learning's contribution to revitalisation after twelve years – a reasonable time for rigorous research and revitalisation – remains elusive. Learning diverts from adversarial organising, which is central to the unions' future.

Tensions between organising and other functions (Heery and Simms 2008) intensify when overall resources are declining. The TUC can no longer afford its traditional annual congress. It cannot coordinate campaigns against the Coalition government without a 10p levy on members of cash-strapped affiliates (TUC 2011: 119). Prioritisation is essential. Yet TUC staff partly explain decline by reference to 'the level of investment made in organising and recruitment' (2011: 16), while 'never before have unions devoted such a high percentage of their resources to helping members improve their skills and so help themselves, their workplace and the economy' (TUC 2012: 3). Resources going to learning are increasing while investment in organising is insufficient: 'some 300 staff (i.e. one in ten of all union officers) were now supporting learning. Almost half were funded by unions themselves, not the ULF' (2011: 119). In the absence of rigorous evidence that learning stimulates revitalisation, these developments should be opposed by all who champion the rebuilding of a trade unionism based on class and rooted in collective struggle.

Against that background, the next section of this paper documents TUC policy from the 1990s, underlining the distance between goals and outcomes. It illustrates how aspiration to an influential position in a statutory regulated system of training based in social partnership produced a public administration role with minimal policy influence in a modified neoliberal system. The third section critiques the methods, evidence and arguments of academics who have commended the initiative. Nobody denies that workers may join or become active in unions because of learning provision; but inadequate evidence exists to conclude that it has contributed significantly to enhancing membership, activism or power. The fourth section appraises the developing literature and how supportive scholars have responded to criticism, with the fifth being an attempt to summarise recent debate. The conclusion draws together the threads of our argument.

## **TUC Policy 1990-2011: Evolution and evaluation**

From the 1990s, TUC policy had six components. First, the TUC insisted that a significant part of Britain's economic problems lay in low-level skills and inadequate vocational training, a view shared with successive governments. Second, progress depended on the statutory regulation of training. Third, success demanded social partnership institutions on the European model. Fourth, unions must extend bargaining over training, integrating it with bargaining over safety, technology and work organisation to influence corporate strategy. By imposing high-quality working regimes, unions would stimulate genuine partnership with employers. Fifth, Congress House possessed a specific interest in training: its job was to provide leadership to affiliates. Finally, the TUC would collaborate with even hostile governments (McIlroy, 2000).

'The key ingredient of Britain's economic recovery', it was argued, 'is raising the skills of our people. They are our most valuable asset. That philosophy lies at the heart of the role of the [TUC] Education and Training Committee' (TUC 1992: 288). Employers did not invest sufficiently in skills. The remedy entailed joint action with unions to regulate training, investment in high-quality products and the production process (TUC

1990: 556-7). There existed a 'need for training to be placed high on union bargaining agendas' (1990: 102) as one aspect of 'strategic productivism' which could galvanise employers into modernisation (c.f. Streeck 1989). Collective bargaining was indispensable. Unions 'should press employers to conclude agreements over high quality training programmes' (TUC 1990: 566). State intervention was essential to ensure employees received paid release and employers paid for training. A National Training Fund was proposed, with a levy on every workplace. It was essential to restore tripartism, revamped as social partnership, and to 'establish trade unions as strong social partners' (TUC 1992: 12; 1994: 320). Crucially, in the context of New Labour's subsequent privileging of employers, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) opposed statutory regulation and the extension of collective bargaining (TUC 1990: 103). From 1993, Congress House 'identified vocational training as a key area in which the TUC could provide enhanced services to affiliates. It should act to increase the proportion of unionised workplaces where training and development is negotiated' (TUC 1993: 64).

This approach extended services to members, simultaneously permitting 'unions to demonstrate their ability to cooperate in a productivist strategy ... these strategies are unlikely to make significant progress in the absence of statutory intervention on training' (Keep and Rainbird 1995: 537). The National Union of Public Employees 'initiated the "Return to Learn" programme as a service to members' (1995: 536). Ford pioneered Employee Development Assistance Programmes (EDAP), which resourced wide-ranging educational provision (Beattie 1997). Both were distinct from employer training and collective bargaining; neither encroached on management prerogative. By 1998, even where union representatives were present, managers provided no information about training in 43 per cent of cases, and negotiated in under 4 per cent of cases (Cully et al. 1999: 105). New Labour produced perseverance: 'The General Council have put education and training high up their agenda ... They recognize the decisive role learning can play in improving competitiveness, increasing employability and eradicating social exclusion' (TUC 1997: 31). The objective remained 'to help trade unions negotiate learning opportunities ... The aim was to build up trade unions' capacity to put training onto bargaining agendas' (1997: 34). The more diffuse 'learning', reflecting a failure to negotiate training and a turn to EDAPs (Employee Development Assistance Programmes), was increasingly employed; nonetheless, 'action to increase levels of vocational training within companies is vital to the success of any strategy aimed at establishing a culture of lifelong learning' (TUC 1998a: 31).

Further to that, 'the current voluntaristic approach is inadequate ... statutory intervention ... is required to ensure that workplace training and workplace learning are firmly established on every company's agenda' (1998a). Congress delegates argued, 'We need a statutory framework to achieve a comprehensive system in which all employers meet their obligations and employees are entitled to paid educational leave' (see TUC 1998a: 107). The TUC 'made the case for social partnership in education and training' (TUC 1997: 32). It insisted that 'effective strategies for investment in skills *depend* on social partnership' (TUC 1998b: 109, emphasis added). This agenda was determined by the TUC. It wanted a levy of employee entitlement to five training days annually and individual learning accounts, 'but as integral parts of a statutory package; not as individual options' (Clough 2004: 19). The Congress resolved: 'The first steps towards a training system fit for the new millennium must be a statutory framework which includes

a modern sectoral-based levy system' (TUC 1998a: 108). Legislation to stimulate bargaining remained imperative: 'including training in the new law on union recognition would facilitate union involvement and help the government achieve its plans' (TUC 1998b: 109). The report of a National Advisory Group for Continuing Education supported union involvement. The Green Paper, *The Learning Age*, disappointed: 'The absence of a strong statutory framework for training was criticized by the General Council in their response' (TUC 1998b: 109).

What transpired is best understood as integral to New Labour's modified neoliberalism. Party-union links; financial dependence on unions, which could influence party policy; a desire for harmony; and pre-Blair commitments all ensured concessions. They were small and calibrated to reinforce the recasting of unions as facilitators to markets and management. New Labour intended to foster soft partnership and 'supply-side trade unionism' (Ewing 2005). Both the government and the CBI balked at significant erosion of management prerogative. There would be no statutory framework, social partnership or rights to bargain.

The unions got what the CBI permitted: the ULF, starting at an annual £2m, and ULRs, without negotiating rights (McIlroy 2008: 293-4). The unions envisaged a national fund based on a levy of employers, with ULRs bargaining over company training. The government provided only a union facilitation fund and statutory rights to time off for advising employers and counselling employees. In 2004, 28 per cent of workplace reps received no information about training. They were consulted in 38 per cent of cases, but negotiated in only 8 per cent of cases (Kersley et al. 2006: 152-5). The ULF – an idea which New Labour claimed as its own (Stubbs 2008: 20) – and advisory ULRs were small concessions, measured against what had not been conceded.

That the TUC continued to campaign for its full agenda suggested their insufficiency. It continued to request legal intervention to force employers to bargain (TUC 2001: 85; TUC 2003a: 9), without success. New Labour ruled out making training a bargaining issue after the government-union Warwick Agreement (TUC 2006a:70). Yet it was still asserted, 'The General Council believes the development of a greater partnership agenda will extend union influence at a corporate level over an organization's policy and strategy and increase the involvement of reps and members at a local level in the implementation of business decisions' (TUC 2003a: 44).

Far from influencing corporate strategy, union pressure secured a marginal voice in training. One leader remarked, 'the government has decided to leave the involvement of trade unions at the discretion of employers, maintaining a voluntary system that has failed the country so miserably' (TUC 2003b: 104). Congress continued to demand 'statutory rights to negotiate on training, paid educational leave and Workplace Learning Committees ... we need to keep the pressure on the Government to introduce statutory training levies' (TUC 2005: 27, 80). The general council maintained its call for social partnership on skills (TUC 2007: 115-17). Union leaders were not prepared to press what purchase they had on New Labour. By 2006, its pioneer, John Monks, admitted defeat over partnership: 'The new capitalism wants none of it' (Upchurch 2009: 247). A member of the TUC staff estimated,

Quantitatively the [ULF] projects have resulted in relatively small outcomes but this represents the relatively small scale funding ... Without rights to negotiate over training the unions

will remain in a relatively weak position in advancing this agenda and challenging employer prerogative. (Clough 2004: 33, 35; 2007: 20)

Lacking such rights, ULRs represented just a small fraction of workers: 51 per cent – 64 per cent in the private sector – were inactive (Hoque and Bacon 2008). Failure provoked retreat: from attempting to subject employer training to bargaining to providing EDAP style ‘learning services’. Union activities, a TUC official observed, ‘have mainly been aimed at meeting the needs of the individual and restricted to basic skills and employee development in general, rather than encompassing company training directly related to productivity’ (Clough 2007: 22).

Training and productivity remained management’s preserve. There was increasing emphasis on the role the fallback, diverse ‘learning services’, played in revitalisation. In order to establish the impact of their contribution, it was important to construct ‘an evidence base to demonstrate the recruitment and organisation benefits of learning’ (TUC 2004: 11, 207). This was hardly an open-ended exercise. Benefits were assumed. ‘There is strong evidence,’ the TUC had already reported, ‘that the sharply increasing number of ULRs ... is boosting union organizing’ (TUC 2004: 11). The claim was not backed, however, by ‘strong evidence’, but by self-reporting by possibly unrepresentative ULRs who responded to TUC questionnaires. However, ‘Maximising learning’s potential to support union organization and growth’ was added to Unionlearn’s remit (TUC 2007: 124, 128). The transfer of ULF to Unionlearn, with 126 members of staff and annual funding of £15.5 million, consolidated matters (TUC 2009a: 133). Its staff lobbied Conservative and Liberal Democrat leaders around the 2010 general election. A Memorandum of Agreement with the Coalition government meant the grant declined by 6 per cent, while the Further Education and Skills budget was cut by 25 per cent (TUC 2011: 126).<sup>2</sup>

In 2009, Barber reflected, ‘perhaps the greatest success of recent years has been trade union involvement in the learning agenda’ (TUC 2009a: 2). But while the TUC established a niche in a neoliberal system, it failed to achieve its aims: a statutory framework, social partnership, and bargaining over training as part of greater voice in company decisions. It endorsed and delivered government policy (Lloyd and Payne 2007) and had minimal influence in a system it judged ‘no longer fit for purpose’ (TUC 2006b: 2). Unionlearn pursues ‘key government priorities’ within the terms of a contract with the Coalition, which was revised to require it to also service non-union workplaces (Unionlearn 2010: 9). Civil servants attend Unionlearn meetings and discuss union proposals (2010: 4). The state privatises functions while maintaining control by contracting-out delivery to companies, charities and unions (McIlroy 2008: 290-1). The issues have not been debated at Congress, while Unionlearn’s board consists of union leaders with no grassroots representation.

In 2009-10, ‘117,105 people accessed learning as a result of ULF projects’ (TUC 2010: 116). Given the figure of 25,000 ULRs then trained – many inactive – each ULR notionally helped around five people into learning. ULRs only operate in the 27 per cent of workplaces that recognise unions. Union learning *follows* the contours of declining trade unionism – it is not proactive in extending trade unionism. It remains a public-sector phenomenon, and is closer to the educationally eclectic EDAP model than the ‘bargaining over company training’ productivist model. There are vocational courses; but



there is also replication of EDAP's individual choice, with 'courses ranging from philosophy to the care of koi fish' (Clough 2004: 18). Valuable as this is, it is not what the TUC prescribed.

In that context, positive external assessment could validate self-affirmation, reassure critics and justify taxpayers' funds. Unionlearn commissioned and publicised papers from sympathetic scholars. It fostered 'a network of more than 70 interested academics' (TUC 2007: 122): 'A key object of Unionlearn [is] to disseminate findings from research on unions and learning to the union movement and the academic community' (TUC 2009a: 133). We look next at the academic literature.

## **Return to learn, revitalisation and collective bargaining**

The 'new bargaining agenda' of the 1990s stimulated interest, and provoked differences between academics. Stuart (1996) criticised colleagues who 'overestimated training as a 'mutual gains' issue which demanded 'cooperative accommodation' from unions. Unions, Stuart claimed, could perform 'an important regulatory role in assuring training provision and training quality, a role that is all the more salient in a liberal economy such as the UK, due to an increased requirement on workplace bargaining as a means of obtaining advances in skill training' (1996: 254). Distributive bargaining was important to progress, and integrative bargaining misconceived:

The extent to which training, as a bargaining issue, offers integrative potential (i.e. essentially positive sum bargaining outcomes) is open to serious doubt ... To suggest that unions should relinquish any import over adversarial issues and engage in negotiations of a more cooperative kind seriously underestimates the likely gains for labour, and, of greater consequence, implies union acquiescence and compliance. (1996: 256, 263)<sup>3</sup>

But as the union agenda turned towards cooperation, academics followed, deserting conflictual for collaborative conceptions of training and learning. One particular programme attracted attention. Unison's National Education Officer described his union's Return to Learn courses, organised collaboratively with employers but distinct from vocational training, as encouraging the 'acquisition of confidence, marketable skills and the capacity to make real choices on employment opportunities and life style' (Sutherland 2000: 190). Munro and Rainbird's (2000ab) papers hinged on a 1995 consultants' survey commissioned by Unison (Kennedy 1995). Kennedy's sample was small, and biased by its exclusion of drop-outs 'with negative feelings'. Kennedy reported that 59 per cent of respondents entered further education, and 29 per cent were promoted. A small minority – 23 per cent – claimed their union involvement had increased. Of that 23 per cent, 14 per cent reported having become workplace representatives, and 25 per cent branch officers (Kennedy 1995: 5, 23-4). On that tenuous basis, and without control groups of non-course participants, Munro and Rainbird (2000a: 234) asserted, 'students of the Return to Learn courses are more likely to become involved in union activities'.

Munro and Rainbird (2004: 429) subsequently claimed that 25 per cent of respondents to Kennedy's survey – and not, as Kennedy had reported, 25 per cent of 23 per cent of respondents – became branch officers; and that 14 per cent, not 14 per cent of 23 per



cent, as Kennedy had recorded, became workplace representatives. They also failed to highlight Kennedy's main finding: that these courses stimulated individual mobility. In a factionalised union (McIlroy and Daniels 2009: 152-3), they neglected to relate education to powerholders' objectives: '[graduates] bring with them into their activism a commitment and loyalty towards the union ... This contrasts quite markedly with those activists who appear to believe that activism is synonymous with criticising the organisation and its leadership' (Sutherland 2000: 190). Return to Learn produced not just activists, but activists uncritical of Unison's leaders. This was not explored further.<sup>4</sup> Instead, Munro and Rainbird generalised about the courses' impact on revitalisation:

There is already evidence that programmes such as Return to Learn ... can contribute to organizational renewal through serving as a recruitment tool and through giving members the confidence to become more active in the union ... The union's approach to lifelong learning is not just a tool for recruitment and retention of members but also a means of promoting activism. (Munro and Rainbird 2000: 185-6)

Although sustaining evidence was slim, these conclusions were uncritically accepted by other academics. Citing Munro and Rainbird, Wallis, Stuart and Greenwood (2005: 286) insisted,

the advancement of the learning agenda has been intimately connected to the issue of trade union revitalization ... The appeal of learning opportunities and skill acquisition to existing and potential members *has been shown* to contribute to the organizing agenda while at the same time facilitating benefits for members in line with the servicing agenda. (emphasis added)

Additional evidence from a small study of ULRs in South Yorkshire hardly substantiated this verdict. Like Munro and Rainbird's work, they registered a major qualification: that learning was only likely to act as an instrument of revitalisation in areas of pre-existing union strength, i.e. where it was needed least. Learning could facilitate recruitment given relatively high density, but unorganised areas, the major barrier to revitalisation, in which ULRs had no rights, were relatively immune. This confirmed doubts about learning's role in national revitalisation.

These claims were open to more fundamental objections. Existing research, overlooked by Munro and Rainbird and Wallis et al., suggested that workers did not join unions or remain members in significant numbers because they credited them with arranging learning. A study of organising in Unison published simultaneously with Munro and Rainbird's work did not mention Return to Learn. Waddington and Kerr (2000: Table 17. 1) found 'support if I have a problem at work' was the main motivation underpinning trade unionism. More than 63 per cent of respondents cited this as their reason for remaining members, while only 5.2 per cent cited 'membership benefits'. A general survey published three years before Munro and Rainbird found that a tiny 5 per cent of respondents cited provision of training and education as their reason for joining. This compared with the 72 per cent citing 'protection at work', 36 per cent 'improved pay and conditions', and 15 per cent 'legal advice' (Waddington and Whitston 1997: 521).

'Learning partnerships' were 'extremely rare' (Rainbird 2005: 48). There was insufficient evidence that they could meaningfully contribute to revitalisation. Nonetheless, Stuart and Wallis (2007: 154) considered Munro and Rainbird's work 'particularly

instructive' in facilitating partnerships that could benefit learning and union renewal. Collective bargaining had made little headway, while 'a "linguistic turn" away from training and development to learning ... raised important questions about the nature, focus and mode of delivery of skills' (2007: 153).

Stuart (1996) had insisted that the TUC agenda demanded adversarial bargaining. Ten years later, Stuart and Wallis (2007: 153) stated that the TUC had wanted to 'move away from the "traditional, often adversarial" bargaining approach towards a more constructive ... developmental emphasis'. Readers were referred to 'Stuart 1996 for a detailed account' (2007). Yet Stuart's 1996 paper argued that unions should *not* renounce adversarialism. Views change. Change requires explanation. 'Mutual gains' bargaining, disregarded by Stuart in 1996 in favour of adversarial bargaining, had by 2007, as the TUC changed tack, 'become central to debates, not only around ... the learning agenda but trade union renewal and social partnership' (2007). Mutual gains and partnership had been criticised: 'flawed though it may be, the discourse has become near hegemonic' (2007). Rather, by 2007, partnership was increasingly deprecated (Badigavannar and Kelly 2011). Wallis and Stuart did not explain who created this 'near hegemony' – exaggerated, if moved beyond 'discourse' to the small number of partnership agreements (Kelly 2004) – and whether they opposed or supported it.

They did advocate the 'mutual gains' model as a vehicle for union advance. Integrating the interests of employer and employee, learning 'should be separated from traditional (focused on distributive issues) trade union channels of collective bargaining' (Wallis and Stuart 2007: 154). Somewhat obviously, 'learning partnerships' need not endanger workplace organisation. If they generated increased communication and trust, 'they have the potential to "spill-over" into more traditional industrial relations machinery and lead to the formation of more "robust" rather than "shallow" general partnerships' (2007: 154). On the other hand, separating learning from bargaining 'makes it possible for unions to cooperate around learning, whilst at the same time taking a stronger more adversarial stance on other industrial relations concerns' (2007: 154). Apart from the disproportionate if abstract burden these authors placed on 'rare', and limited, learning partnerships, no robust evidence was provided as to how spillover into general partnership or militancy could develop – or the probability of its happening. The Return to Learn model could produce collaboration or adversarialism, but no persuasive examples were cited to suggest it had or would produce either.

There was another major qualification: 'where leading workplace trade unionists regard learning as of secondary interest or importance to more traditional union concerns then union-led developments are likely to remain marginal' (2007: 154). Unless learning was regarded as equally important to wages, conditions and protection – improbable and undesirable, given the practice of British unions, and the factors that motivate members to join – growth in learning partnerships would be slight. In articles that asserted their significance, they were fundamentally handicapped by declarations that they would succeed only where unions were relatively strong and where learning was as great a priority as central, indispensable, union issues.

Despite tergiversations and qualifications that undermined the importance accorded to learning partnerships, this work confirmed the way of the world. The 'linguistic turn' was not an unauthored discursive process, but 'the TUC turn', a response to failure, away from making training the subject of bargaining anchored in 'strategic productivism',

towards consensual, individual driven EDAP. Academics uncritically followed. But empirical findings (Stuart and Wallis 2007: 155-165) from research commissioned by the TUC recorded uneven progress. There were small increases in learning where it was, as these authors recommended, separated from collective bargaining and adversarialism. 'Learning agreements' – which did not regulate training or predicate collective bargaining over learning – were facilitated by ULRs, ULF finance, and power balance between management and unions.

A contrasting literature emerged. Ewing (2005) provided a framework for understanding New Labour's desire to turn unions into allies of management. Lloyd and Payne (2007) criticised New Labour strategy. The real problem was the structural deficiencies of the British economy, which limited demand for the higher-level skills the TUC was intent on creating. Its role in delivering state strategy may have inhibited criticism of state policy (2007: 71). Hoque and Bacon (2008) found little bargaining over training. In workplaces with ULRs, training was no more common than in workplaces without them. Workers with no vocational qualifications and women received less training in workplaces with a ULR than those who possessed qualifications, although it was possible that ULRs might be more effective in providing learning beyond employment training. McIlroy and Croucher (2008, 2009) stressed the debilities of the system and deficits in TUC policy attainment. Its methodological and evidential limitations meant that the literature did not permit generalisations about revitalisation. Revitalisation that developed on the basis of learning – unlikely, given the constraints of the environment and restrictions on ULRs' incidence and functions – would stimulate business unionism. Supporters of learning partnerships greatly overestimated their importance.

## Assessing a developing literature

Most academics, however, wrote positively of learning partnerships, engaging with context and critique in a fragmentary fashion. Cassell and Lee (2009) rehearsed Munro and Rainbird's work without addressing published criticisms. The only issue confronted was McIlroy's citation of the literature on joining unions – an obvious obstacle to positive prognosis. They noted that it had been published before the emergence of ULRs: 'it could be that the ULR initiative has enabled learning to gain a higher profile within trade unions than it had previously' (2009: 216). 'A higher profile' does not equate with more workers joining because of learning. Alternatively, we might surmise that from 2007, falling wages and redundancies rendered traditional reasons for joining *more* compelling. Cassell and Lee produced no evidence to disturb earlier findings.

Heyes (2009) made the same point, repeating qualifications that McIlroy (2008: 302) had already registered: that the findings of Waddington and Whitston were not up-to-date, and that more research was needed. That Kennedy's 14-year-old survey underpinned Munro and Rainbird's claims, which Heyes, too, repeated uncritically, went unremarked. However, he noted that although only 5 per cent of members cited training as a reason for joining, this figure consisted of 8 per cent women and 2 per cent men. More significantly, 92 per cent of women did not give training and education as a reason for joining. Heyes observed that 'younger workers were more likely than older workers to cite education and training as a reason for joining' (2009: 186). In the survey, 5.3 per cent of respondents below 20 years of age, 7.1 per cent from 21-25 years of age, and 4.7

per cent from 31-40 referred to training and education as their reason for joining. This compared with 4.1 per cent in 41-50-year-old age group who gave that reason. The difference was slight. The key point was that 79.9 per cent of respondents under 20, 76.2 per cent aged from 21-24, and 69.7 per cent aged 26-30 cited 'support if I had a problem at work' as their reason for joining (Waddington and Whitston 1997: 527). Heyes's prevarication contrasts with the unequivocal stance of leading authorities:

Research was to show (Waddington and Whitston, 1997) that this approach was largely misconceived: new recruits to trade unionism, even among those favorably placed in the labour market, were primarily concerned with the traditional union functions of collective improvements in wages and conditions and protection against arbitrary action by the employer. (Hyman, 2001: 108)

Heyes claimed that McIlroy had stated that unions had 'abandoned their commitment to providing trade union education while becoming providers of training services delivered on behalf of the state' (Heyes 2009: 185). No such statement appeared in the literature. Trade union education, albeit dominated by 'tools' courses, is unquestionably alive. He asserted, again without citation: '[McIlroy] implies (on the basis of very little evidence) that courses supported by trade unions no longer serve to promote union awareness' (2009: 185). Yet the closest we get to this is an uncontroversial observation that Return to Learn courses did not address trade unionism (McIlroy 2008: 299, citing Kennedy 1995: 5). This was followed in the text by comments from a Return to Learn student that she 'would have *welcomed a union awareness course*' (McIlroy 2008: 305, quoting Kennedy 1995: 25, emphasis in the original).

Heyes distinguished education and training from other services: 'they are often "consumed collectively" e.g. together in a classroom environment and may involve ongoing relationships between learners and unions' (2009: 194). Most education and training is 'consumed collectively' – and, inevitably, individually. When members attend college courses, the courses are 'consumed' alongside non-unionists. 'Collective consumption' of language courses does not translate into joining, still less remaining in unions. An act of conversion beyond osmosis remains necessary. Individuals need to credit the union with 'giving them something', and reciprocate by joining on the logic of the service model (Sutherland 2000: 191). Statistically significant acts of conversion have been insufficiently documented for us to conclude they have contributed to revitalisation.

Evidence suggests scant prospect of revitalisation, or at least, of revitalisation in which learning plays a significant part. An authoritative survey reflects: 'We see little reason to imagine that there will be a resurgence of union power in the current context' (Simms and Charlwood, 2010: 143-144). Pursuing the improbable narrative of revitalisation in which ULRs and Equality Representatives figure significantly, Moore (2009a) characterised scholars who contested it as purveyors of 'unrelenting structural superdeterminism', who neglected 'the agency of workers'. Yet the work she criticised emphasised, 'The relationship between agency and structure is dialectical: trade unions can improve things by working to maximize the potential opportunities that the current unfavorable environment offers' (Daniels 2009). Nonetheless, the evidence disclosed insufficient signs of revitalisation, while ULRs hardly constituted compelling agents for change.

Ignoring rebuttal, Moore (2011: 48) returned to the theme. Although Daniels and McIlroy pinpointed 'crucially how these circumstances have hamstrung trade unionism ... their pessimism conveys only a limited sense of the dialectical relationship between structure and agency and a downplaying of the objective, subjective, material and ideological factors that inform workplace relations and which are informed by workplace dynamics'. In the absence of explanation as to why these authors have a limited sense of interplay between structure and agency, what the 'objective, subjective, material and ideological' factors are, and how they currently influence 'workplace relations' and 'workplace dynamics' in ways that engender 'optimism' about revitalisation, this is disabblingly abstract. A proper account would weigh the power of state and employers, compared with unions. It would analyse the transformations in economics, politics, industry, employment, class structure, culture, consciousness and employment relations which drove decline and militate against revitalisation.

'Objective, subjective, material and ideological factors' influence struggle differently at different times. Since 1979, they have facilitated erosion of socialist consciousness, trade unionism and workplace organisation. Conflict is endemic, and 'workplace dynamics' fluctuate. They may make for weakness or power, acquiescence or combativity. In the 1970s, the second components of these couplets flourished. Today, 'workplace dynamics' are qualitatively different. Moore's discourse is ahistorical and formulaic: viz 'consciousness may be transformed through experience, struggle, education and political engagement, although this may be momentary' (Moore 2011: 48). If it is 'momentary', it will be insignificant. But Moore does not explain how or why consciousness will develop in a radical direction. Since the 1970s, experience and struggle *have* transformed generally reformist consciousness: in a conservative direction.

Moore endows activists with power they do not possess: agency was exercised in innumerable struggles as neoliberalism hamstrung unions. It was defeated by the more potent agency of capital and the state (Hyman 2001: 103-110). Moore's belief that ULRs can revolutionise matters is unconvincing. Having interviewed in a union context – although, crucially, not observed in action – five (Moore 2011: 73) or six (2011: 10) unrepresentative ULRs, she speculates implausibly that ULRs' advisory role provides 'opportunities to challenge state policy and in particular circumstances to broaden the union role beyond economic interest, to widen constituencies and support processes of political participation' (2011: 94).

Investing activists with exaggerated abilities to attain goals beyond their remit in overpowering circumstances, Moore misreads contrary views. Daniels and McIlroy (2009: 140, emphasis added) wrote: '*If such developments provide opportunities for trade union activists, their formal purpose and the restricted nature of the roles they offer cannot be minimized or downplayed*'. Moore (2011: 98) quotes that sentence, but omits its italicised words, depriving the sentence of balance so that it emphasises only restriction. Explaining the full import of her clipped version, she continues, 'By implication those taking up the equality role are not full activists ... and since there is some evidence that the role attracts black, disabled, LGBT ... and women workers, there is the potential for a hierarchy of union representatives which reinforces discrimination in the workplace' (2011). Readers who scrutinize the original sentence and surrounding text will find nothing, explicit or implicit, about 'hierarchy' or 'discrimination'.

Moore imputes determinism to writers who eschew voluntarism and acknowledge that 'men make history but they do not make it as they please, they do not make it under self-selected circumstances but in circumstances already given and transmitted from the past' (Marx 1979 [1852]). She claims, 'They [McIlroy and Daniels] suggest that [New Labour's strategy of supply-side unionism] represents a real constraint on the activity of workplace representatives and by implication their consciousness' (2011: 42). Her claim may be compared with the following:

There was no guarantee that state funding would achieve its declared aim of transforming trade unions ... The extent to which these initiatives would redirect the efforts and change the behaviour of trade unionists beyond stimulating dependency on state revenues was likewise a moot point. (McIlroy 2009: 88)

There is no determinism there. There is nothing about ULRs' consciousness, or the impact on it of state strategy. The implication is, again, entirely Moore's.

Empirical findings added little to the case for revitalisation. Heyes (2009) interviewed two union officers and conducted a course interview. He accepted that his two cases were unrepresentative and selected because they were successful (2009: 188). In one case, most students joined; in the other, a quarter joined. In one case, ongoing relationships were precarious; in the other, the union claimed links between education and organising (2009: 192, 193). Cassell and Lee (2009) interviewed 15 union officers engaged with learning and two ULF employees. They presented a positive picture, but noted, in a comment applicable to most of the literature, 'Given the role of the interviewees within their unions we would expect that they would be positive about learning initiatives. Therefore, their views need to be understood in this context' (2009: 226).

Interviewing a similar constituency for Unionlearn, Moore (2009b) reported that learning was becoming embedded in organising. In the words of one union officer, 'We've got no firm outcomes, we've got anecdotal stuff [but] not hard statistical evidence' (2009b: 28). Further claims that learning figured significantly in revitalisation based on research commissioned by the Scottish government depended on self-reporting by stakeholders and samples with questionable response rates (Findlay and Warhurst 2011). A positive evaluation commissioned by Unionlearn was methodologically flawed: 'There is clear evidence', it asserted, 'that the ULF is making an impact, nearly two thirds of [ULF project officers] 62 per cent claimed that learning had become linked to the union organizing agenda during projects ... and a further 16 per cent reported that this was something the union was working towards' (Stuart et al. 2010: 64). No corroboration of the claims of officers working for Unionlearn, financed by the ULF and assessing their own performance in an evaluation commissioned by Unionlearn, was conducted. Yet 'The difficulty of measuring these connections [between learning and recruitment] was a matter of concern for those working on learning projects as they felt that they may have to justify their position considerably more in future, especially if the ULF money ceased to be available' (Mustchin 2009: 155). The background to the evaluation was negotiations between the TUC and government over Unionlearn's grant.

In addition to the survey of 71 project managers, 10 coordinators and 3 workers, this evaluation was based on a sample of employers which generated 415 responses (Stuart et al. 2010: ix, 12). This shed light on where union learning takes place, and on the kind



of employers who support it when it is state financed. The employers came from unionised and thus unrepresentative enterprises: only 2 per cent were 'anti-union', with 75 per cent favouring union membership and 77 per cent claiming they had signed a partnership agreement on industrial relations. Given declining membership and the infrequency of partnership agreements (Badigavannar and Kelly 2011), this is a remarkably unrepresentative sample. As with the ULF respondents, claims were not measured against practice. Read carefully, this research provides little hope for the growth of learning outside union-friendly territory or its role in revitalisation.

## **'Critical engagement' and 'incorporation' reconsidered**

In a stimulating discussion of the literature, Rainbird and Stuart (2011) reviewed academic work supportive and critical of the learning project. Supporters, they claim, believe, 'Unions [are] able to influence state policy', and the critics, that 'Unions [are] unable to influence state policy'. Supporters hold that 'stronger legal rights [are] preferable but union activity [is] possible'; while critics hold that 'strong legal rights are determinant'. For supporters, 'learning policy [is] seen as an "opportunity structure"'; while for critics, unions are 'reduced to the role of service providers'. In the first perspective, 'there is emphasis on the integration of learning with other union functions'; in the second, 'ULRs act to displace traditional shop steward role and [the] bargaining function of unions'. Supporters contend learning 'contributes to active membership', and critics that it makes 'little contribution to membership, activism or recruitment' (2011: Table 1, 205). On this basis, the framework of critics is labelled 'incorporation', and the perspective of supporters 'critical engagement' (2011).

Typologies entail compression which faithfully encapsulates meaning. Here, simplistic polarities – 'unions able/unable to influence state policy' – are complemented by straw men. 'The incorporation thesis,' it is stated, 'characterises this agenda as one wholly initiated and developed by government' (2011: 213). The view is ascribed to critics that the learning agenda 'has been designed, implemented and dictated by state interests' (2011: 204). No evidence is provided, and nobody has asserted that the agenda was 'wholly' initiated, still less 'dictated' by the state. Rainbird and Stuart caricature the evidenced conclusion (see above) that it was *decisively influenced* by the state. The ULF and ULRs, they insist, 'were not simply state-designed initiatives foisted on an unwilling union movement' (2011: 206). Nobody said they were, or that the TUC had *no* impact on policy formation. The issue is not one of 'influence/no influence', but the degree of influence deduced from TUC policy and policy outcomes. It has been small, viz: 'the unions' role in the making of policy on workplace learning has been of secondary significance' (McIlroy 2008: 295).

Terminating in 1998, Rainbird and Stuart's sketchy history is flawed by its failure to compare what unions wanted with what they received. The TUC policy agenda, and the distance between aspiration and achievement, is dismissed without argument: 'The insistence that [achievement] should be judged against an idealized statutory paradigm misses the point' (Rainbird and Stuart 2011: 213). In so far as they have a point, it is based on confusion between state 'policy formation', the term they use throughout, and unions' application of enacted policy: the way this panned out in practice. They conflate the two.



If we stick for a moment with policy formation as conventionally understood, TUC pressure produced limited results. There was nothing 'idealised' about 'the statutory paradigm'. It was Congress policy. It delivered only the ULF and ULRs without bargaining rights (see above). The single success since has been a restricted employee right to request training (TUC 2010: 210). After eight years of New Labour, one authority judged, 'Unions now have almost no formal input into national policy deliberations' (Keep 2006: 56).

If we turn from policy enactment to the *policy application* on which Rainbird and Stuart's case for TUC impact rests, we encounter additional misapprehensions. Nobody has claimed that 'stronger legal rights are *determinant*', or that without stronger rights union activity is not *possible* (Rainbird and Stuart 2011: Table 1, p. 205, emphasis added). Moreover, their depiction of union practice transcends state policy in only one contentious particular: ULRs, they assert, 'negotiate and consult with employers in two thirds and three quarters of cases respectively' (ibid: 210). This assertion again derives from uncorroborated reports which we might expect to be positive. We are given no measure of 'negotiation'. Presumably conducted outside collective bargaining mechanisms, as Rainbird and Stuart prescribe, it could denote a range of exchanges.

The TUC recently claimed, citing the same surveys, 'Around seven in ten union project officers reported that learning had been incorporated into collective bargaining as a result of their project to some extent' (TUC 2010: 122). The 'to some extent' undermines the assertion. But the strategy adumbrated by Stuart and his colleagues required that learning should *not* be incorporated into collective bargaining structures. The TUC says it has been. They cannot both be right. In 2005, Rainbird reflected on the relationship between policy formation and application in light of New Labour's settlement: 'In so far as those entitlements are tokenistic it could be argued that there is little scope for trade unionists to develop "a new and modern role"' (Rainbird 2005: 60). A year later, the TUC concluded, 'the existing voluntary framework is no longer fit for purpose' (TUC 2006b: 2). The evidence Rainbird and Stuart now present fails to counteract skepticism that five years after there was 'little scope' for a new union role, and following years of crisis and decline, policy application has transcended policy and a system 'unfit for purpose' has been alchemised into a success.

The transfer effects of arranging learning on organising and revitalisation constituted an important aspect of Rainbird and Stuart's earlier work. They now receive cursory attention. These authors now hold that learning 'contributes to active membership': an attenuated version of earlier claims about its impact on recruitment, organising and revitalisation. Organising is side-stepped: 'How all this contributes to the wider agenda of union organizing is a bigger debate' (2010). But it has been central to the debate Rainbird and Munro are reporting on, and they were once less reticent (see above). They retreat from their earlier position on recruitment: 'few trade unionists would expect members to join specifically because of learning opportunities but because of wider issues of representation and rights at work' (2010: 211). Yet Rainbird and Stuart once did. They now adopt, without explanation, criticism of their original claims.

Critics, Rainbird and Stuart assert, believe that 'ULRs act to displace traditional shop steward role and bargaining function of unions' (2010: Table 1, 205). This précisés statements such as, 'If present trends continue and unions prove incapable of reversing the decline in collective bargaining, both the unions' workplace role and the mix of

workplace representation may develop further away from the stylized model of the independent shop steward who bargains, towards the activist who provides “an inexpensive source of expert advice for employers” ([dti.gov.uk/employment/](http://dti.gov.uk/employment/))’ (McIlroy 2008: 298). The point remains pertinent. There are 102,000 stewards and 28,000 ULRs, representing a significant decline and increase respectively. If current tendencies continue, we will see more advisory workplace representatives and further moves away from adversarial workplace relations. Barber (2011) wants learning ‘to drive modernisation ... redefining what trade unionism is’ (c.f. Wallis and Stuart 2007: 154). The TUC states, ‘about ten per cent of all union activity is now about learning ... double the figure ten years ago’ (2012: 102). This plausibly entails diminished activity on more important issues. Given declining resources, more officers working on learning means fewer organising.

‘Critical engagement’ does not effectively capture Rainbird and Stuart’s approach. Criticism is marginal in comparison with the critique of scholars they term ‘incorporationist’. Rainbird and Stuart engaged with the unions through commissioned research, while critics did so independently. ‘Incorporation’ usually denotes the absorption of unions into the state by neo-corporatist strategies (Panitch 1980). It is a disproportionate term for denoting the discrete delivery of learning by unions and voluntary bodies. The term has never been used by any academic listed as subscribing to it. Rainbird and Stuart never define what *they* mean by it, while their use of ‘incorporation’ is sufficiently diffuse as to render it meaningless. Belief that ‘state interests are pre-eminent’ or ‘stronger legal rights are determinant’ or that ‘union learning [is] subject to dead weight and substitution effects’ – all of which they consider hallmarks of incorporation (Rainbird and Stuart 2011: Table 1, 5) – have little to do with the absorption of unions into the state.

Their characterisation of the work of eight scholars obfuscates rather than clarifies. The unifying *thread* is that all have questioned state policy or TUC success. The notable aspect of Forrester’s (2004) work is probing the dominance of employability in union learning. Ewing (2005) depicted state policy as aiming at stimulating ‘supply-side unionism’. If he was ‘too emphatic’ (McIlroy 2008: 298), he did not foresee outcomes as determined or envisage unions’ ‘incorporation’. Bacon and Hoque’s inclusion is mystifying: their rigorous work questioned ULRs’ limitations, urging statutory rights. In no sense is it informed by a perspective of ‘incorporation’. Lloyd and Payne (2007) questioned TUC success and saw state finance inhibiting criticism – incorporationist only in the most diluted sense. Their justification for deeming Croucher and McIlroy ‘incorporationist’ is that in a discourse which terms unions ‘agents’ or ‘contractors’ of the state, there is the isolated phrase, ‘The TUC acts not as an alternative to the state but as an arm of the state’ (McIlroy 2008: 297). In transmuting image into anatomy, Rainbird and Stuart are perhaps over-literal. What is impermissible is that tabulating this phrase in their typology of ‘incorporation’ (Rainbird and Stuart 2011: 204, Table 1, 205), they then apply it to seven academics who never used it. Rainbird and Stuart’s amalgam falls short of satisfactory classification.

## Conclusion

This article has discussed the TUC’s transition from failure to create a regulated, productivist training system, based on social partnership and collective bargaining, to celebrating a public administration role marginal to policy formation, arranging diffuse learning

in a modified neoliberal system. Union activity has not qualitatively exceeded that role in practice. Training continues to be determined by employers, and strategy by the state. Unions have retreated to EDAP. How that contributes, at least in planned, coordinated fashion, to national training strategy – as distinct from facilitating individual goals – remains questionable. There is inadequate evidence that an initiative launched in 1998 has meaningfully influenced revitalisation. Our story raises practical questions about revitalisation strategy.

Should workers facing wage freezes fund education for upskilling and adding value to capital, properly provided by HRM departments, subsidising employers while public education is cut? When ‘unions are facing a difficult time in terms of resources and are looking to make the most effective use of staff and money’ (TUC 2009a: 3), is doubling the resources they put into training for individual mobility the best way forward? When ‘loss of jobs in the public sector, the difficulties of organising in the private sector and continuing pressures on union resources make organising more difficult’ (TUC 2012: 1), should unions be drafting scarce resources into learning?

Even in its own terms, Unionlearn is not a priority. It delivers typically where unions are already relatively strong. More than half of union members work in (admittedly ill-defined) managerial, professional, associate professional and technical categories; only 20 per cent of the less skilled are members. Density is three times higher among employees earning £500–£1,000 per week than among those earning less than £250 (TUC 2012: 1). It is not obvious that there is urgent need for ULRs to broker learning opportunities for professionals, other skilled workers – and free-riding non-members. It is difficult to argue that officers are simply managing extra, ‘external’ resources when half of learning activity is funded directly by unions (TUC 2012: 102).<sup>5</sup> There is no convincing evidence that learning substantially facilitates organising. Rather, there is an opportunity cost and a disturbing dualism: the TUC is campaigning against a hostile government and working for a friendly one. The perspective of learning ‘redefining what trade unionism is’ (Barber 2011) should worry all advocates of adversarial trade unionism.

These issues have been inadequately confronted by academics working on a canvas which largely excludes critical analysis of state policy, TUC institutional goals – or alternatives. Reflecting the ‘abstracted empiricism’ criticised by scholars from C. Wright Mills (1959: 95–9) to Richard Hyman (1972: 157–9; 2009), the project is presented unproblematically. ‘Illiberal practicality’ extends to academics recommending that Unionlearn’s grant should be renewed (Stuart et al. 2010: 113). This literature hinges on small case-studies, generalised through unargued assertion of their wider applicability, not through evidenced exploration of the specific factors which facilitate or impede translation of the experience they record to environments where trade unionism is weak and declining. The literature is dominated by self-reporting by staff who are paid via, and representatives trained by, Unionlearn. Data is collected and controlled by the stakeholder, with little corroboration from disinterested parties. Findings are generally restricted to areas of strength and active ULRs. There is little discussion of history, or theories of union growth and decline or of how resurgence developed during the years 1910–1914, 1933–1940 and 1968–1979. The relationship of learning to training and collective bargaining and evaluation of TUC policy are blurred. Academics have reversed their views on collective bargaining, the relationship of the regulatory system to practice and union revitalisation, without explaining why.

Much of the research was commissioned by Unionlearn. It describes itself as a research centre; it is primarily a player. It frames problems, brokers data and selects sites for investigation (Warhurst et al. 2007). Its explanation of findings exceeds the evidence (see Wallis and Stuart, 2007: 2). It questions critical work. In one such case, the TUC commissioned an alternative survey based on Unionlearn data from errant authors (Bacon and Hoque 2008, 2009). McIlroy's work has been described, without evidence, as relying 'too much on politics' (Wilson 2010: 120). Yet Unionlearn staff and union education officers are political actors. Supportive academics applaud learning as 'a political act' (Munro and Rainbird 2000a: 174). Commissioning is a political process, neatly encapsulated in TUC explanation of the renewal of its grant by the Coalition: 'This reflects the cross party support for union learning and recognition of its positive impact as evidenced by the in-depth evaluation carried out by Leeds University Business School' (TUC 2011: 126).<sup>6</sup>

Advocates of industrial relations defend it in comparison with subjects such as human resource management, which is light on context and consecrates the interests of organisational powerholders. The British Universities Industrial Relations Association argues that industrial relations is 'firmly rooted in a tradition of critical social science ... Asking critical questions about the goals of employer initiatives, union campaigns or government policy may not always be popular with those in positions of power and authority. But unless critical questions are asked then serious and negative consequences can quickly ensue' (BUIRA 2009: 55-6). Moreover, 'critical social science encourages and values dissent and disagreement in research, in teaching and in the world of policy making' (2009: 55). The production of literature on union learning has not exemplified this approach. If these declarations are to be practised, scholars must apply critical social science to contemporary trade unionism. That includes critical scrutiny of its powerholders, its policies, and initiatives such as Unionlearn.

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## Endnotes

1. On union revitalisation, see Behrens et al. 2004.
2. In 2010, the TUC condemned cuts of £200m to public-sector adult learning, with further education colleges forced to axe courses (TUC 2010b: 24, 145-6).
3. Distributive bargaining' (emphasising win-lose distribution, gains and losses), and 'integrative bargaining' (emphasising common interest and mutual gains) were models of *collective bargaining* discussed in Walton and McKersie (1965). The learning literature advocates for learning being kept separate from collective bargaining, although it is unclear as to whether it should then be the subject of collective bargaining, consultation on the EU directive model of request and response, or some other method.
4. The role played by education in internal politics requires further attention.
5. In 1998, the TUC reported, 'The General Council have committed a large part of their work to helping unions build up their capacity to act as partners on workplace learning' (1998b: 108). Twelve years ago, learning formed 'a substantial part of the TUC's work' (2000: 5). It forms a more substantial part today.
6. It is unusual for organisations delivering services under contracts from the state to appoint their own evaluators without independently commissioned reports.

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